



A Guide to Developing Gender-Responsive Guaranteed Income (GI) and Cash Transfer Programs

Institute for Women's Policy Research



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About This Toolkit

This toolkit is part of the *Income and Cash Transfer, Guaranteed Income, and Economic Relief Programs for Women* research project led by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) through its *Policies for Action Research Hub*, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It contributes to IWPR's broader commitment to advancing bold, evidence-informed policies that uplift women and their families. By examining how guaranteed income and other cash-transfer models can promote economic security, health, and well-being, this project aims to drive transformative change, ensuring that women—no matter their race, ethnicity, gender expression, or income level—have access to the resources, stability, and opportunities they need to thrive.

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Executive Summary

Guaranteed income (GI) programs have expanded rapidly across the United States since 2018, offering unconditional cash transfers to enhance financial security for underserved communities. As more than 100 programs have emerged, women—especially mothers and caregivers—have become central participants, whether directly targeted or indirectly reached through caregiver-focused eligibility. Despite women’s substantial representation in GI programs, gender-specific data remain limited, and most initiatives have not systematically incorporated gender-responsive approaches.

This toolkit was created to help GI programs better recognize and address the gendered dynamics that shape participants’ experiences, including lower incomes, time poverty, labor-market segregation, unpaid care responsibilities, and heightened exposure to gender-based violence. It offers practical strategies for GI stakeholders—including policymakers, municipal leaders, funders, community partners, practitioners, and researchers—to implement gender-sensitive and gender-responsive practices across design, implementation, and evaluation, strengthening impact while avoiding the reinforcement of harmful gender norms.

Designed for the broader GI community, as well as policymakers and advocates working with cash transfer programs, this toolkit draws on interviews with more than 20 GI practitioners and a growing body of research on gender-responsive social protection. Each section offers actionable recommendations, examples from the field, and a final self-assessment to support continuous learning and more equitable outcomes.

A Toolkit for a Gender-Sensitive Approach: Purpose, Audience, and Origins

Why did we create this toolkit?

The landscape of guaranteed income (GI) pilots in the United States has expanded rapidly since the first programs were launched in 2018 (Castro and West 2022).^{*} Designed as unconditional cash transfers, GI programs aim to assist underserved communities, which are often excluded from other forms of support. While characteristics of GI programs vary, most provide participants with regular, unconditional cash payments for a set period of time, aiming to create a minimum income and ensure recipients have a minimum level of financial security.

In less than a decade, more than 100 GI programs have been implemented in the United States, providing direct assistance to tens of thousands of participants. While these programs benefit diverse communities with varying needs, gender plays a crucial role in shaping their impact (Rodriguez et al. 2025). IWPR's analysis shows that women make up a substantial portion of recipients, either because programs directly target women or because they indirectly reach large numbers of women by focusing on primary caregivers, households with children, or pregnant people—groups in which women are overrepresented. Despite this being a latent reality, rigorous gender-specific impact data remain limited, and no single national statistic exists for the exact share of women beneficiaries across all GI pilots and programs (Sandoval 2023).

We designed this toolkit because women, particularly single mothers and caregivers, often face economic hardships that GI programs can help alleviate. Ensuring that women reap the greatest benefits from participation in GI programs requires designing programs that consider the unique challenges they face due to interconnected gender issues such as lower incomes, time poverty, labor force segregation, higher unemployment, caregiving responsibilities, unpaid care and domestic work, lower intra-household bargaining power, and higher exposure to domestic violence. Recognizing and responding to these gendered dynamics is essential to maximizing the impact of GI programs and ensuring equitable economic security for all participants.

Because women are at the center of the GI movement and represent an important group among program recipients, we designed this toolkit to provide strategies and tools to help incorporate a gender-sensitive approach to **program design, implementation, and evaluation**. These strategies can help programs ensure that they do not reinforce the harmful gender norms and stereotypes that underpin inequality in access to resources,

Guaranteed Income (GI) is the name given to unconditional cash transfer programs designed to smooth income volatility and provide the basis for financial stability to individuals and groups who are at risk of economic insecurity. These programs provide regular, unrestricted cash payments for a set period of time to support participants' economic empowerment while respecting their autonomy and agency.

^{*}For a detailed discussion of what distinguishes GI pilots from other cash transfer programs, and a history of US programs dating back to the Alaska Permanent Fund in 1976, see IWPR's 2023 report, *Where to From Here? Understanding the Expanding Landscape of Cash Transfers in the US and their Impact on Women*, at <https://iwpr.org/where-to-from-here-understanding-the-expanding-landscape-of-cash-transfers-in-the-us-and-their-impact-on-women/>.

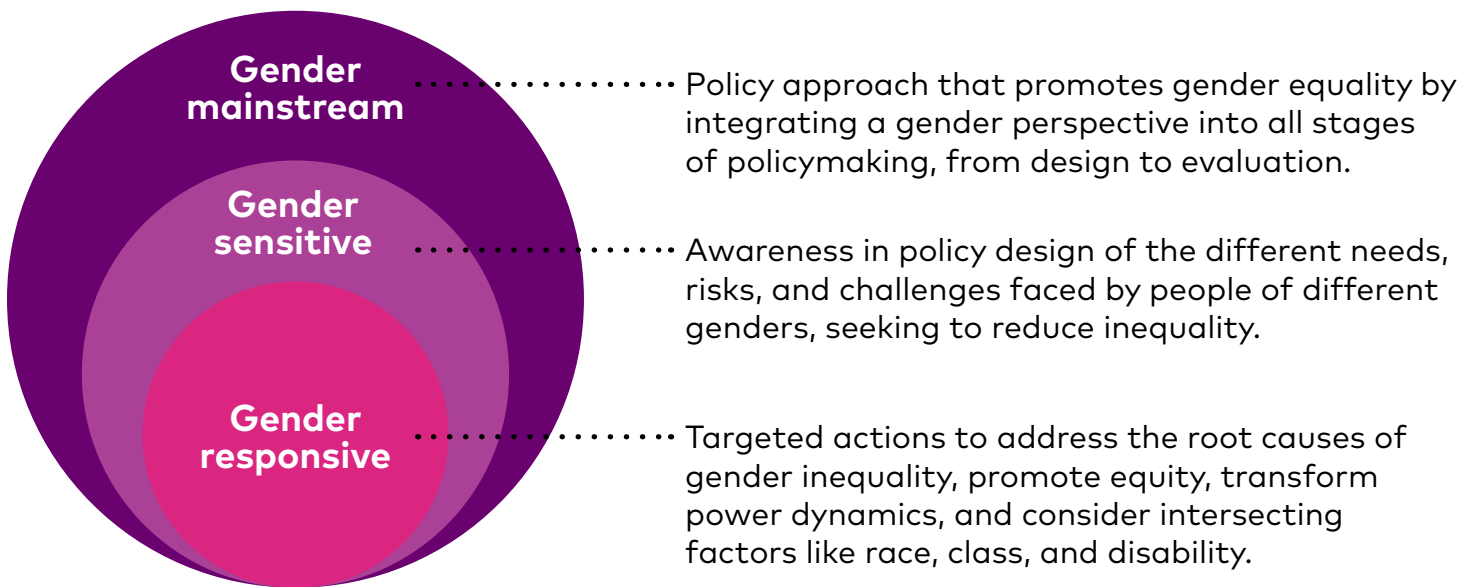
opportunities, and agency. Adopting **gender-sensitive** and **gender-responsive approaches** (see Box 1) to program design, implementation, and evaluation can enhance GI programs' contributions to gender equity and racial justice and contribute to the overall goal of translating pilot programs into policy.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of designing policies and programs with a gender awareness to anticipate their impact on participants and affected populations of all genders. This strategy seeks to integrate diverse gender perspectives into the design, implementation, and evaluation stages to address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities effectively and ultimately achieve the goal of gender equality.

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed to guide stakeholders in critically considering the role of gender at every stage of a GI program, from design through implementation to evaluation. Most importantly, it highlights the observed and anticipated gendered impacts of GI programs, helping them identify strategies to enhance their ability to achieve their program objectives while promoting gender equity. The toolkit is grounded in an intersectional perspective, recognizing that women's diverse social identities, such as race, class, and sexuality, interact to produce distinct experiences of privilege and discrimination. By acknowledging the heterogeneity of women's lives, it emphasizes accessibility and inclusion throughout its guidance. The toolkit also serves as a practical framework for **gender mainstreaming**, supporting programs in identifying and addressing participants' gender-specific needs while contributing to the reduction of economic and social gender inequalities through gender-sensitive and gender-responsive practices (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. What Is the Difference between Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Sensitive, and Gender Responsive?



A wide range of stakeholders—both individuals and organizations—involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of GI initiatives and cash transfers more broadly can use this toolkit. In general, **policymakers, elected officials and municipal leaders, program administrators, community-based organizations (CBOs) and community partners, practitioners and advocates, and funders** will all benefit from the insights and guidance

provided. It is also a valuable resource for **researchers, scholars, and students** interested in gender-responsive direct assistance programs and policy development. Whether designing a new GI initiative or getting ready to enroll a program's next cohort, this toolkit provides insights and strategies to help create programs that make meaningful contributions to achieving gender equity.

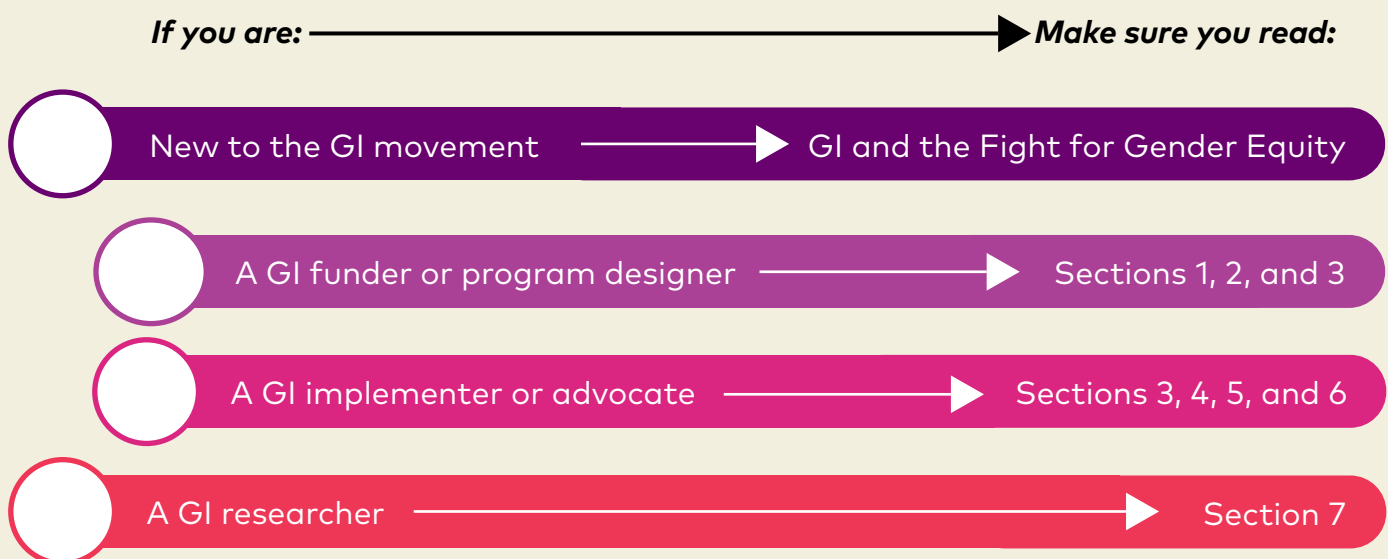
What data and sources shaped our insights?

The guidance and strategies presented in this toolkit are informed by interviews with over 20 stakeholders in the GI space, including program administrators and staff, researchers conducting program evaluations, and policy advocates across the United States. Conversations with these stakeholders provided invaluable insights into the complex landscape of choices, challenges, and opportunities faced by practitioners, researchers, and advocates in the GI space. Their perspectives were integral to understanding how decisions are made in an environment of political and fiscal constraints and helped identify where there are opportunities for gender mainstreaming. This toolkit also incorporates insights from the growing body of research on gender-responsive social programming, including evaluations of cash transfer and GI programs from around the world.

How to use this toolkit?

Each section in this toolkit introduces a recommendation for GI programs to incorporate gender mainstreaming in an agile way, thereby expanding their impact on participants and communities (see Figure 2). Each section explores common opportunities for gender equity, then highlights the challenges and strategies identified in best practices. Each idea is supported by quotes and case studies drawn from interviews with GI practitioners and stakeholders. At the end of the toolkit, you'll find a **roadmap** and **self-assessment tool** with reflective questions to help you identify both successes and windows for growth as a member of the GI community.

Figure 2. How to Use This Toolkit



Box 1. Key Terms and Concepts

Benefit Cliff	A sudden and sometimes unexpected loss of public benefits due to a small or temporary increase in income.
Cash Transfers	Programs that provide cash benefits—often electronically—to a targeted group, commonly including individuals experiencing poverty or impacted by a humanitarian crisis or natural disaster. Conditional transfers require participants to fulfill specific actions to receive benefits; unconditional transfers do not.
Community-Based Organization (CBO)	A locally governed entity established by community members to address shared needs, priorities, or development objectives. CBOs may operate as formally registered institutions or as informal associations. Regardless of their legal status, they are characterized by leadership drawn from within the community, mechanisms of accountability to community members, and programmatic activities informed by lived experience and local context.
Gender Mainstreaming	The process of integrating gender awareness into policy and program design in order to anticipate their impact on participants and affected populations of all genders. This strategy seeks to integrate diverse gender perspectives into the design, implementation, and evaluation stages to address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities effectively and ultimately achieve the goal of gender equality.
Gender Norms	Social and cultural expectations, rules, and beliefs that shape what is considered appropriate behavior, attitudes, and appearance for women, men, and gender-diverse individuals based on perceived sex.* These norms vary across contexts and evolve over time, influencing how people behave and interact, while often reinforcing inequalities or shaping access to personal, social, and economic opportunities.
Gender-Sensitive	The capacity of policies and programs to recognize and acknowledge the diverse needs, challenges, and opportunities experienced by individuals of different genders within their social, economic, and political contexts. A gender-sensitive approach helps identify and account for the different needs, risks, and vulnerabilities experienced by individuals of different genders, acknowledging the harmful gender norms and dynamics that underpin gender inequities. Overall, this approach incorporates gender considerations into policy design, strengthening analysis of gender dynamics and reducing the risk of adverse or unintended outcomes.
Gender Equity	The fair treatment of people of all gender identities. It encompasses deliberate efforts and policies that support equitable access to resources, opportunities, and power across all genders. It requires identifying and addressing the systemic inequities that contribute to the marginalization of groups of people based on their gender.

*For definitions of key terms and concepts related to gender, please refer to the Gender Transformative Education Glossary developed by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative at <https://www.ungei.org/gender-transformative-education-glossary/gender/gender-norms>.

Gender-Inclusive Language	The use of language that avoids reinforcing traditional gender norms or excluding individuals based on gender identity. Gender-inclusive language seeks to acknowledge and respect the diversity of gender identities and expressions, ensuring everyone feels represented and respected.
Guaranteed Income (GI)	Unconditional cash transfer programs designed to support individuals and groups facing economic insecurity and marginalization. These programs provide regular, unrestricted cash payments for a set period to support participants' economic empowerment while respecting their autonomy and agency.
Intersectionality	A concept that refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations and overlapping identities such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, ability, and gender, which intersect to determine power, access to opportunities, and exposure to barriers. An intersectional approach or framework recognizes how these determinants of power and status can be acknowledged for policy design and evaluation.
Racial Justice	The dismantling of structures of oppression to achieve systemic fair treatment of people of all races.
Social Norms	Collectively shared rules that guide acceptable behavior within a given social group.

Guaranteed Income and the Fight for Gender Equity

GI programs represent an important innovation in social policy and programming in the United States, particularly in the fight for gender equity and racial justice. While intended to help people facing financial hardship, long-standing government-led social assistance policies and programs are highly stringent, employing strict means-testing, work requirements, and detailed eligibility checks, thereby imposing high administrative burdens and stress on individuals seeking resources and services to which they are entitled (Jain Family Institute 2021). In contrast, GI programs operate on a foundation of trust and respect, representing a much-needed alternative to government-led social assistance programs that have long stigmatized and surveilled recipients (Amerikaner et al. 2025). GI programs are functional, reliable, and provide unconditional and regular cash benefits to individuals and communities experiencing economic insecurity, marginalization, and historic disinvestment (Zewde et al. 2021). More importantly, these programs provide direct assistance to people in need while prioritizing their autonomy, agency, and dignity, and rejecting the need for restrictions or conditions.

The roots of GI programs in the United States can be traced back to the nation's long-standing economic and social justice movements, including the civil rights and women's rights movements of the 20th century (Zewde et al 2021). Recognizing the persistent unmet needs of diverse communities nationwide, stakeholders have created a community of advocates to champion GI initiatives and direct cash assistance more broadly. At their core, GI programs are grounded in a collective commitment to addressing the needs of people facing economic hardship and marginalization, especially those excluded from and stigmatized by government-led social assistance programs. Creating more inclusive social programs for individuals and communities that have been historically and systemically marginalized is essential to addressing persistent disinvestment and entrenched inequalities.

Systemic and structural factors contribute to women's economic instability and vulnerability, hindering their financial security and independence. The gender wage gap—women earning significantly less than men for the same work—and the fact that this gap is exacerbated by occupational segregation, with women often concentrated in lower-paying jobs and industries, leads to their heightened economic vulnerability (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2025). Women also take on unpaid care work, such as child-rearing, caring for children and adults with disabilities, or caring for older adults, which, in addition to household responsibilities and domestic work, limits their ability to fully participate in the labor market and advance in their careers. Additionally, workplace discrimination and precarious jobs without social protections or flexible schedules make it harder for them to achieve job stability and stable earnings (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2025). These factors combined disproportionately affect women and restrict their financial stability, economic security, and opportunities for success.

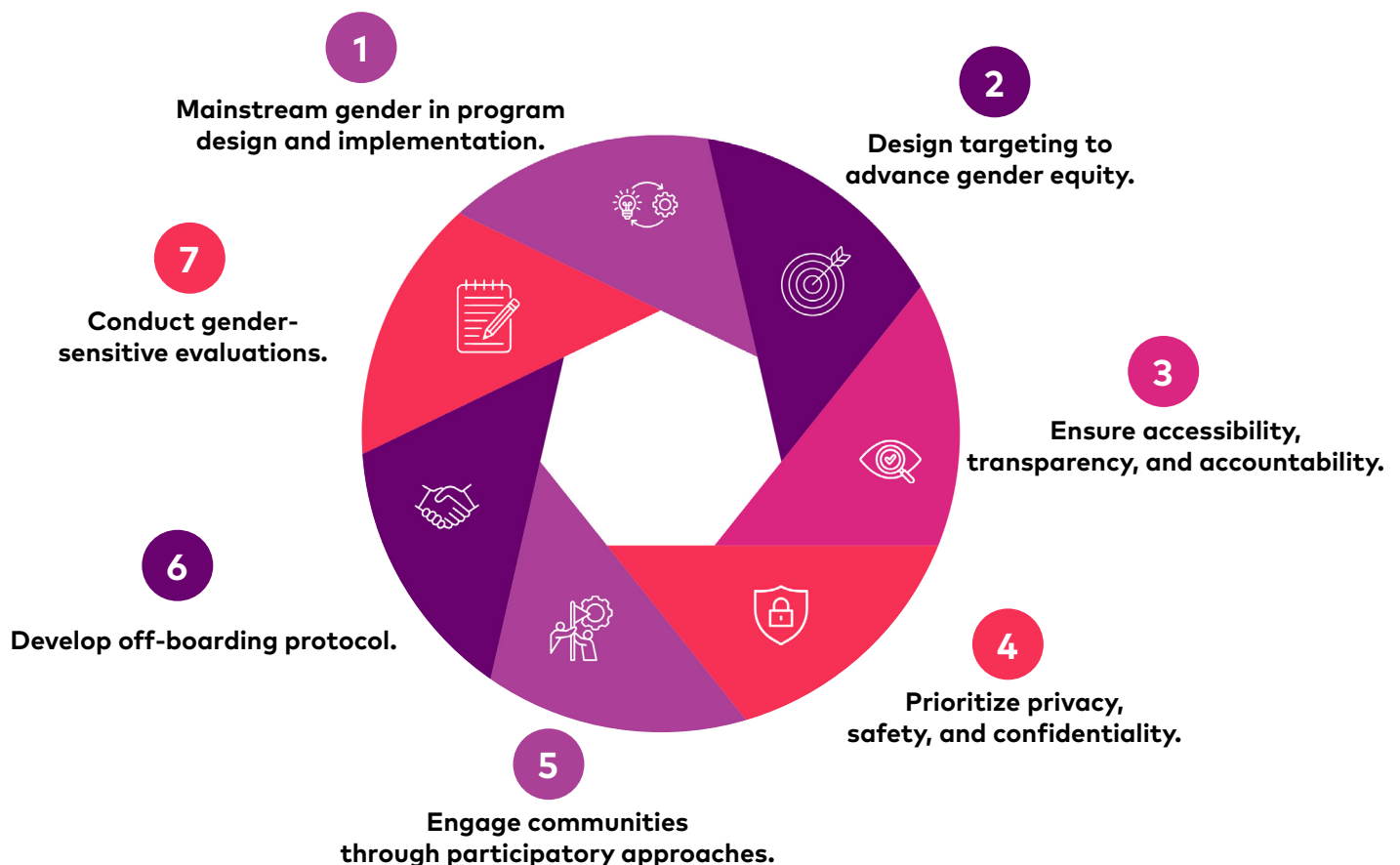
Additionally, research shows Black and Latina women face unique and persistent barriers to achieving economic security (Michener and Brower 2020). In 2024, 1 in 7 women and girls lived in poverty, with Black and Latina women experiencing the highest poverty rates (National Women's Law Center 2025). The gender disparities in labor force participation, employment segregation, the unequal distribution of unpaid care, as well as lower levels of Social Security access in old age, all contribute to the disproportionate number of women—especially women of color—living in poverty (Almeida and Salas-Betsch 2023).

The growing community of GI advocates has worked tirelessly to promote GI initiatives, highlighting their positive impacts. These programs enhance financial stability, helping

individuals manage emergencies, build savings, and reduce stress, which improves overall well-being. They also lead to better health outcomes and improved academic performance, and, despite concerns, research shows that GI does not reduce work motivation, as recipients often maintain or increase their work levels (West et al. 2023). With over 100 programs now in place, this expansion reflects the efforts of dedicated advocates and rising public interest in alternatives to the failing social protection system. Economic insecurity, inflation, and concerns over automation have fueled this movement, which focuses on empowering communities through investment, collaboration, and trust-building to address challenges and reimagine solutions to economic insecurity (Economic Security Project 2024).

GI initiatives have addressed entrenched gender inequality in the United States by promoting women’s participation in GI programs. Many programs employ eligibility criteria and targeting mechanisms that explicitly and implicitly target women (Sandoval 2023). Many of these programs support women during periods of the life cycle in which they are most at risk of economic insecurity, including during and after pregnancy (Sandoval forthcoming). Designing GI programs that reach women experiencing economic insecurity can have a meaningful impact on their individual and household well-being (Yang et al. 2024; Brugger et al. 2024; Moore et al. 2022; Flynn et al. 2024; Westbrook 2024). While GI programs have provided much-needed support to thousands of women across the US, our analysis of trends in program design and implementation shows that there are opportunities for improving the gender sensitivity and responsiveness of GI programs. **This toolkit outlines seven key actions that GI programs can implement to conduct gender mainstreaming and amplify their impact, expand the reach of benefits, and minimize adverse impacts on women and participants of all genders (see Figure 3).**

Figure 3. The Seven Actions for Achieving Gender Mainstreaming in GI Programs





Integrate Gender Mainstreaming in Program Design and Implementation





The landscape of GI programs in the United States has expanded rapidly since the first pilots were launched in 2018 (Castro and West 2022). Though GI programs differ widely in their goals and the communities they serve, recent analysis identifies a striking pattern: **Women make up the majority of participants in many GI programs, regardless of whether those programs explicitly target women or not** (Stanford Basic Income Lab 2026). At the same time, this trend emerges against a backdrop of increasing legal challenges to gender- and race-based targeting, with federal and state courts more frequently scrutinizing or striking down programs that use protected-class criteria under equal protection principles (Congressional Research Service 2024).

Despite women's substantial participation, gender mainstreaming—integrating gender perspectives into every stage of design, implementation, and evaluation—remains uneven across GI initiatives. Yet adopting gender-sensitive (design stage) and gender-responsive (implementation stage) approaches is not only feasible but transformative: Gender-mainstreamed GI programs are positioned to become more inclusive, more equitable, and more effective. In this context, failing to integrate a gender lens means overlooking one of the clearest pathways to maximizing the impact, legitimacy, and long-term sustainability of GI programs, especially for the women who already benefit most from them.

Start by Conducting a Gender Analysis to Identify Community Needs

By adopting a gender-mainstreaming approach from the outset, gender considerations become an explicit and integral component of a program. This ensures that the concerns and experiences of individuals in their full gender diversity are systematically incorporated into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs (see Table 1), thereby helping to prevent the perpetuation of inequality (Neimanis n.d.). Research on the impact of cash transfers highlights that this type of income can enhance women's intra-household decision-making and bargaining power (Kirkwood et al. 2024; Hagen-Zanker et al. 2017), but the magnitude and nature of the impact depend on cultural factors like existing gender dynamics within the household and the community, and program design features such as who receives the transfer and how the transfer takes place. Additionally, while studies find that directing transfers to women can improve the quality of household spending and long-term welfare outcomes compared to decisions made by male recipients (Armand et al. 2020), the broader evidence shows that the impact of these programs depends on the social and cultural context of each community, particularly its gender norms.

For example, findings show that cash transfers improve women's bargaining power, mainly in households without domestic violence (Casco Guerra 2020), and generally have a positive impact on women's employment and empowerment, with larger impacts in contexts with lower gender constraints (Diaz-Pardo and Rao 2024)—i.e., more equal unpaid care responsibilities and time allocation to domestic work between women and men, more access to employment opportunities for women, and the availability of affordable child care and other social programs supporting caregiving.

Gender mainstreaming should begin with an analysis of the dynamics that underpin gender disparities in access to opportunities, resources, and services within a specific community (Esser et al. 2019). To effectively engage a specific community through gender mainstreaming, we recommend partnering with CBOs, grassroots organizations, and other locally embedded institutions. These partnerships can support an initial analysis of **how**

gender and social norms* shape community dynamics, power relations, and context-specific interactions (see [Section 5](#) for recommendations on community partnerships).

These partnerships are essential, since gender mainstreaming also requires a deeper consideration of the function that gender plays in determining the roles and responsibilities within the household, and information on these types of private dynamics is hard to access, especially by those outside the community. This includes **understanding trends in the distribution of decision-making power**—for example, who controls financial resources, who makes choices about household spending, work, and caregiving, and whose preferences shape overall household priorities—as well as **time-use allocation**, such as the division of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men and time devoted to paid work and leisure time, which can follow commonly shared gender norms predominant in a particular community and can be linked to legal, cultural, religious, customary, or institutional factors (CARE 2020; Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2017).

Develop Strategies to Anticipate and Address Adverse Effects

Conducting gender mainstreaming also serves as a critical tool for anticipating adverse program impacts and establishing protocols to limit and address them. Identifying and understanding the context-specific needs and challenges faced by members of a community is essential for selecting program features that effectively address the needs of the target population. For example, although evidence shows that cash transfers reduce intimate partner violence and other forms of violence, some subgroups of women face elevated risk when partners have low education or substance abuse (Heinemann et al. 2024). Anticipating how a program will impact gender relations and economic gender disparities can help prevent adverse effects on participants, which can be directly related to their gender (Civicus 2011).

By identifying the specific challenges women face—whether in terms of economic security, unpaid care, or harmful gender norms—programs can ensure they are equitable and responsive (Esser et al. 2019; Levasseur et al. 2018). Considering these gender disparities and dynamics is crucial to preventing avoidable adverse effects and ensuring that programs contribute to rather than undermine gender equity.

Challenge 1. Identifying Gender Norms and Dynamics

Identifying how gender norms shape social dynamics, intra-household relations, the division of labor, and access to opportunities, resources, and services in the community where the GI program will be implemented.

Strategies

- Establish partnerships with CBOs and community members to identify social dynamics and trends around gender norms.
- Identify gender disparities in access to income, employment, and the distribution of unpaid care (including caregiving for children, persons with disabilities, and older adults) and domestic work within the community.
- Identify how gender relates to the specific needs and challenges experienced by community members, particularly among groups experiencing economic insecurity or marginalization.

*For a discussion on the differences between gender norms and social norms, we recommend Cislighi and Heise (2019), who provide a historical and analytical description of the similarities and differences between the two types of norms, trace the evolution of these concepts, and highlight key points of tension.

Challenge 2. Identifying Strategies to Prevent Adverse Effects

Developing strategies to anticipate and address adverse effects of program implementation.

Strategies

- Establish partnerships with CBOs and community members to identify social dynamics that program intervention may negatively impact.
- Consider how program participation will impact intra-household relations, including the distribution of paid and unpaid work, access to and control over resources, and decision-making power.
- Identify legal, cultural, religious, customary, or institutional factors that may inhibit women's participation in the program, or that may be impacted by their participation.
- Create strategies to mitigate anticipated risks and adverse impacts for participants, including communication strategies that raise awareness about potential issues and connect participants to additional resources.

Table 1. Gender Mainstreaming for GI Programs

Steps	Guiding question	Considerations
Conduct a gender assessment.	What are the specific risks and vulnerabilities being experienced by women in the community the program will serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income, food, and housing insecurity • Unpaid care work burdens • Exposure to domestic and gender-based violence • Exclusion from financial services • Access to public services (health, education, child care)
Assess the impact of gender norms on participation.	What gender norms will impact community members' ability to participate in the program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency • Intra-household decision-making • Financial autonomy • Caregiving responsibilities • Stigma
Anticipate gendered perceptions of the program.	How will gender norms affect community perceptions and engagement with the program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigmatization of recipients of social assistance • Consider potential backlash and exclusion risks for men • Consider whether targeting or language will increase the exclusion of gender-nonconforming individuals
Evaluate potential reinforcement of harmful gender norms.	Will the program reinforce gender norms within the community that are harmful to women?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to reinforce traditional gender roles related to care • Risk of excluding nontraditional caregivers • Perpetuating narratives of deservingness among women



2

Targeting to Advance Gender Equity





Most GI programs employ a series of demographic, geographic, and means-tested targeting to prioritize individuals and communities that best align with the program's objectives. While some GI advocates and stakeholders favor universal basic income (UBI) proposals, budgetary constraints and a lack of political consensus around UBI make targeting an unavoidable necessity in distributing direct assistance. The growing number of GI programs and pilots includes over a dozen that explicitly target women and an even larger number that target households with children, pregnant persons, new mothers, and single parents (Sandoval 2023). Without intentional gender-sensitive targeting design, GI programs risk perpetuating inequalities rather than addressing them. A gender-responsive approach to targeting ensures that eligibility criteria align with the program's goals, avoid reinforcing harmful gender norms, and are structured in ways that do not impose undue burdens on participants.

Avoid Gender Biases in Targeting

Traditional gender norms often position women, especially mothers, as primary caregivers, leading to the assumption that social assistance should be directed toward them to ensure that resources are spent and invested in ways that promote familial well-being. Recognizing and addressing the unique challenges and needs of mothers and caregivers, particularly single mothers, is essential to achieving gender equity. However, it is crucial that program targeting does not reinforce the expectation that unpaid care work, including caregiving and participating in social programs, is solely a woman's responsibility.

Instead, programs should challenge unfair gender norms by designing eligibility criteria that recognize and support all caregivers, including fathers, grandparents, and other nontraditional caregivers. This requires taking strategic actions to counter the stereotypes that shape the public misconceptions that social programs, particularly those that target households with children and caregivers, are only for women. Such actions include using straightforward, inclusive language when disseminating eligibility criteria to ensure all potential participants feel welcome to apply and participate.



Insights from the Field

"There are a lot of women out here who, for them, motherhood is not in the cards. It's not a desire, it's not something they ever saw themselves doing, and it doesn't mean that they contribute any less. They're still mentors to their families, they are aunts, they are caregivers. And even if they weren't [mothers], it doesn't matter. Everybody has their thing that they bring just by being alive and contributing to society."

-Program Associate at an international nonprofit organization promoting GI programs

Inclusive eligibility criteria and messaging should be coupled with strategies to recruit and engage eligible participants in their full diversity. This may require outreach to enroll women who do not identify as caregivers or parents, as well as underrepresented groups of heads of household, parenting grandparents and other family members, and single fathers. This approach broadens programs' inclusivity by recognizing the diversity of roles women play in their households, families, and communities, as well as the diversity of caregivers—men, extended family, neighbors, and community members—and acknowledging diverse family structures and the variety of practices around gender identity.

Challenge 3. Preventing Targeting from Reinforcing Gender Norms

Ensuring program targeting does not reinforce gendered expectations of unpaid care work, including caregiving and social programs participation.

Strategies

- Use inclusive language in program communications, including the dissemination of eligibility criteria and outreach efforts.
- Design eligibility criteria that recognize and support all caregivers, including fathers, grandparents, extended family, and other nontraditional caregivers.

Opt for Gender-Inclusive Language

Achieving gender equity requires social programming that adopts strategies to engage and support people in their full diversity, including parents and caregivers of any gender. Language plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and participation. It reflects and reinforces the gender norms that underpin gender inequality, impacting the way programs are perceived and who engages with them. Programs should avoid gender-specific terms for parents and caregivers and instead use gender-inclusive language. This includes limiting the use of language that reflects a gender binary, which may be exclusionary of gender-diverse individuals. This approach ensures diverse gender identities feel welcomed, especially in programs targeting parents and caregivers, and reduces exclusionary language that reinforces gender inequality.

Challenge 4. Using Gender-Neutral Language

Preventing the use of language that reinforces stereotypes around program participants, reinforces gender norms, or excludes gender-diverse people from participating in the program.

Strategies

- Use gender-inclusive language in all program communications and publications.
- Refrain from using gender-specific terms for parents, pregnant people, and caregivers when the program is open to or includes participants with diverse gender identities.

Adopt a Gender-Sensitive Eligibility and Means-Testing Approach

In addition to demographic targeting, many GI programs employ means testing to reach populations facing economic insecurity (Rodriguez et al. 2025). Means testing that requires income, asset, and social benefits verification can create significant administrative burdens, require the forfeiture of financial privacy, and reinforce the stigmatization of individuals seeking assistance. Moreover, programs that set income thresholds based on household income, assuming equal access to and control over household resources and financial information, might create unnecessary barriers for potential participants with less access to such information or who do not contribute to household income due to other responsibilities. Given gender disparities in labor force participation, part-time work, and wages, women's income and control over resources are often inadequately captured by economic indicators measured at the household level (Kanbur 2018; Malghan and Swaminathan 2021; Obermeier 2023).



Insights from the Field

"We focused on zip codes of most concern, which were zip codes that had high rates of unemployment, high rates of food insecurity—such as food deserts or food swamps—high rates of environmental stressors like pollution and other detrimental health indicators. So, our program approach was very data-driven."

-Director, Economic Mobility and Opportunity at a GI pilot in California

GI stakeholders identified good practices to prevent exclusionary practices, such as implementing a more subtle and seamless means-testing process, which we call a **light-touch eligibility check**, by accepting diverse proof of income documents, such as pay stubs, gig-work earning statements, and proof of public benefits enrollment, and refraining from requiring periodic reporting. These practices help GI programs avoid replicating the burdens of government-led programs while respecting participants' privacy. GI programs should also consider alternative approaches to assessing economic need and program eligibility to overcome the limitations of conventional means testing. This may include evaluating individual income alongside household income, or using non-income indicators such as employment status, caregiver status, food security, or housing stability. Many GI programs have successfully used alternative targeting strategies to avoid the drawbacks of means testing, such as geographic targeting and referral-based recruitment in partnership with CBOs.

Light-touch eligibility check is an approach to participant selection that embraces flexible and innovative forms of eligibility verification—such as varied proof-of-income documents, zip code, public benefit enrollment records, or individual pay stubs—to ensure that applicants can access required documentation quickly and without the burden of complex or costly additional processes.

Challenge 5. Adopting a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Means Testing

Adopting a gender-sensitive approach to eligibility criteria and/or means testing that considers and captures inequality in the intra-household distribution of income and assets in order to capture individual participants' access to economic resources more adequately.

Strategies

- Implement a light-touch eligibility check approach by accepting diverse and innovative proof-of-income documents.
- Adopt alternative approaches to assess economic need based on individual-level data. For example, information on access to economic resources and non-income indicators (employment status, food security, and housing stability).
- Opt for alternative targeting strategies that do not involve means testing, such as geographic targeting, referral-based recruitment conducted in partnership with CBOs, and participatory participant selection.



3

Ensure Accessibility, Transparency, and Accountability





Evidence from GI pilots suggests that these programs are often more accessible and transparent than traditional government-led social assistance programs, largely due to lower administrative burdens, simpler eligibility criteria, and clear, predictable benefit structures (Rodriguez et al. 2025; Roll et al. 2025). The adoption of program features and practices that promote accessibility and transparency reflects the GI movement's commitment to foster community trust and counter the prevailing negative narratives around direct assistance. GI programs are commonly designed to ensure that the application process and payment methods do not pose barriers to participation by any group, especially women. **This is particularly important for the participation of individuals with limited access to technology, those who are unbanked, and people who speak different languages.** Also important is the adoption of accountability mechanisms to ensure transparency and fairness at all stages of the program. Accountability measures such as grievance procedures, participant feedback systems, and independent oversight can strengthen trust in GI programs and ensure that their program features are equitable, responsive, and aligned with their program objectives.



Insights from the Field

"We are very intentional [in making] sure that the application process is as easy as possible and as quick as possible . . . the point is to undo the burden of traditional social service systems. We tried very hard to be kind of the antithesis of all of the nonsense happening over with government programs, and that includes making it a very low barrier to entry."

-National Program Director at a GI initiative for mothers and infants

Administer Easy and Accessible Applications

Stakeholders implementing GI programs face many challenges, but notably, recruiting enough participants is not one of them. The success of GI programs' outreach efforts is demonstrated by the sheer number of applications they receive, oftentimes thousands more applications than the number of participant slots available. Application processes that pose a challenge to potential participants due to their length, submission format, or documentation requirements can result in the exclusion of applicants with the greatest needs, including people experiencing housing instability, informal workers, undocumented immigrants, and persons with disabilities. Given the volume of applications, limiting the documentation required during the initial application process reduces the administrative burden on applicants and program administrators. Additionally, ensuring that applications are accessible in different formats and that only the minimally necessary information is solicited before selection is not only efficient but also helps avoid undue infringement on applicants' time and privacy.

Some programs' adoption of light-touch applications that are easily accessible and only require rigorous eligibility verification after participants have been selected has proven successful. Under this approach, we propose a **two-stage subtle application and eligibility process**: 1) beginning with an application that requires only minimal identification and proof of eligibility, and 2) followed by a more detailed verification and documentation stage after preliminary screening, which reduces the administrative burden for both program managers and prospective participants.

Another element of ensuring accessibility is creating strategies to address potential application submission barriers. This includes publishing program communications and applications in the languages spoken across the target community and providing technical assistance to applicants who cannot access online application portals. The stakeholders interviewed for this toolkit discussed various strategies for ensuring an inclusive application process, including holding in-person recruitment campaigns, providing in-person application support in public spaces like libraries and community centers, ensuring that team members had diverse language skills, and partnering with CBOs to raise public awareness and provide referrals (see Box 2). The use of such strategies is a powerful tool for ensuring that programs are accessible to all eligible participants, particularly groups that face barriers in their access to social assistance, including people who are unhoused, undocumented, mixed-status families, and older individuals, especially those whose first language is not English (Rosen et al. 2001; Zuo and Heflin 2023; Fox 2016).

Two-stage subtle application and eligibility process is a simplified approach to the application and eligibility process done in two stages:

1. Initial screening through a simplified application with minimal identification and proof of eligibility requirements
2. More detailed verification and documentation process for proof of eligibility and participation.



Insights from the Field

"I think human touch is critically important with GI in general, but I think especially [when] serving women. You want people to have faith in you and believe in you, as so many different entities are entering the GI space. Given some women's historical interactions with service providers and with [the] government, it's so important to be grounded in that human touch to really be able to meet people where they're at. I think there's a staffing component that goes into that. Also, making sure that your staff is trained and confident in their skills and abilities to support participants."

-Chief Program Officer at a nonprofit organization managing GI pilots in California

Challenge 6. Ensuring Inclusive Recruitment and Application Process

Ensuring that recruitment and application processes are inclusive, clear, and efficient.

Strategies

- Implement a two-stage subtle application and eligibility process:
 - 1) Start with an application that requires minimal identification and proof of eligibility.
 - 2) Follow with a more detailed verification and documentation of eligibility stage after preliminary screening.
- Design applications in various formats for electronic and in-person submissions.
- Ensure applications are available in the languages spoken in the targeted community.
- Pilot the application process with community partners to ensure that it is as easy to understand as intended.
- Establish communication channels and partnerships with community members to conduct outreach activities that reach groups with historically limited access to social assistance.

Box 2. Fairfax County Economic Mobility Pilot's Approach to Accessibility and Transparency

The Fairfax County Economic Mobility Pilot (FCEMP) provided a monthly guaranteed income of \$750 for 15 months to 180 participants living in ten zip codes in Fairfax County, VA. The program targeted participants identified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) with at least one child under 16 years in their household.

The FCEMP communication campaign and application process reflects a number of best practices in accessible and transparent program design. The program's information and website include a program summary, eligibility requirements, application details, a frequently asked questions section, and copies of program recruitment materials. The website also includes communication materials for community partners and provides detailed information on eligibility verification in 10 languages.

The FCEMP application process promoted accessibility by providing application information in multiple languages and accepting submissions online and in person. The program provided in-person application assistance at seven community centers throughout their target communities on various days and times. This approach ensures that community members can go to a trusted place for help at a day and time that fits with their schedule. Accepting different submission types and providing application assistance is essential to ensuring all potential participants have equal opportunity to apply to the program regardless of their mobility, time constraints, or comfort with technology (Fairfax County Government n.d.).

The website also provided resources to help understand the potential impact of participation on participants' access to and maintenance of public social benefits. Ensuring participants have access to informational resources before applying is an essential first step to implementing ongoing benefits counseling.

Learn more about FCEMP recruitment efforts at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/neighborhood-community-services/economicmobilitypilot/2023-fcemp-recruitment-efforts.



Use Flexible and Responsive Payment Systems

Providing unconditional cash is a powerful tool to help people meet their immediate needs and improve their financial resilience through savings and investments. However, unconditional cash is only truly unconditional when participants can use their benefits whenever and however they see fit. Allowing participants to choose their payment method and change their selection upon request ensures they can access and use their benefits effectively. Payment choice and flexibility are especially important for groups that experience exclusion from mainstream financial services, such as undocumented individuals and survivors of domestic violence who have experienced financial abuse (Mayors for a Guaranteed Income n.d.). Flexibility is also particularly important for participants who might need to suddenly switch payment methods due to compromised privacy or who face conflicts with partners due to undisclosed information about program participation or due to partners' abusive behavior. The payment distribution system must be versatile and sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse needs of individuals who are vulnerable to these types of situations—often women and gender diverse people—enabling them to purchase essentials and pay bills without unnecessary restrictions.



Insights from the Field

"The payment piece is really important. Just letting people receive their payments in as many ways as possible as your payment provider can offer. Not everybody . . . is banked. Not everybody banks the same way."

-Chief Program Officer at a nonprofit organization managing GI pilots California

"We try to provide a variety of ways for young people [participants] to receive their cash, and then each individual person is able to select how they want to get it, and they can change it at any point in time."

-Vice President at a GI pilot program addressing youth homelessness

Offering a range of options—such as direct deposit, reloadable debit cards, physical checks, or other electronic transfers—empowers participants to choose the method that best suits their situation. When payment methods align with participants' needs and preferences, benefits are timely, accessible, and can be used effectively. Payment flexibility ensures that all participants can fully benefit from the program without delays or documentation barriers. Additionally, a responsive payment system is crucial when participants face abuse or financial coercion.

The ability to quickly adjust payment methods when necessary is also an essential safeguarding mechanism, allowing programs to help participants regain control over their benefits and protect them when they are at risk of or exposed to harm. Designing payment systems with an intersectional approach ensures that GI programs are not only equitable in their reach but also safe, accessible, and supportive for everyone, particularly those who are most vulnerable to exploitation and financial insecurity.

Challenge 7. Implementing Flexible Payment Systems

Implementing payment systems that are flexible and responsive to participants' diverse needs.

Strategies

- Offer a range of payment options, such as direct deposit, reloadable debit cards, physical checks, or other electronic transfers.
- Allow participants to choose the payment distribution method that best suits them and partner with a variety of payment systems to align with their preferences.
- Ensure that the payment system is flexible enough to respond to participants' evolving preferences and needs.
- Select payment systems that are accessible and safe for all participants, including those excluded from mainstream financial services and/or at risk of exploitation.

Establish Accountability Mechanisms

Advocates of gender-responsive social protection systems have underscored the importance of establishing grievance and complaint mechanisms in programs. Research indicates that programs often lack adequate accountability structures, limiting transparency and preventing the resolution of discrimination or abuse, which disproportionately affects women and other marginalized groups (Cookson et al. 2024). Due to the high volume of applications, many GI programs limit outreach or use referral-based recruitment through CBOs to manage participant selection. In cases where subjective decision-making occurs, accountability and transparency mechanisms become particularly vital.

GI programs should establish accessible accountability mechanisms for applicants, participants, community members, and stakeholders. Ideally, accountability protocols and mechanisms should be established preemptively, and information about these mechanisms should be widely and publicly available (International Finance Corporation 2009). These mechanisms should include formal channels like in-person mobile units, complaints boxes, online portals, or hotlines, supported by oversight procedures that create a feedback loop (Barca 2016). This process can involve trained staff or community-led grievance committees. Strict protocols are essential to ensure fairness and redress in case of rent-seeking or discrimination, particularly when external stakeholders influence referrals. Establishing feedback loops to address grievances and complaints is tantamount to implementing equitable programming and aligning with the do-no-harm principle (CARE International n.d.).

Challenge 8. Implementing Flexible Payment Systems

Implementing accountability measures that adequately address grievances and complaints to foster trust and strengthen community engagement.

Strategies

- Establish accountability mechanisms and procedures before program implementation.
- Implement communication strategies that inform participants, community members, and stakeholders about the program's accountability mechanisms and procedures.
- Ensure that the accountability mechanisms and procedures create a feedback loop that addresses grievances and complaints in a transparent and efficient manner.



4

Prioritize Privacy, Confidentiality, and Safety





Designing and implementing GI programs with a strong focus on privacy, confidentiality, and safety is critical to ensure that all participants benefit from their program engagement without fear of harm, stigmatization, or exploitation. GI programs serve diverse populations, some of whom are more at risk and vulnerable to the adverse effects of being identified as GI participants. It is essential to develop communication strategies and safeguarding protocols that respond to the needs and preferences of participants. Prioritizing these elements not only safeguards them but also strengthens the positive impact of GI programs by upholding and fostering an atmosphere of respect, trust, and accountability.

Aligning Communication Strategies with Participant Preferences

GI programs adopt multiple approaches for communicating with their participants before starting benefits payments and throughout the program. Some programs have minimal communication after enrollment, while others conduct regular surveys, monthly phone check-ins to confirm receipt of benefits, or periodic caseworker meetings. Some programs couple their regular communications with special mailings or events to celebrate participant milestones and achievements. Knowing which communication strategies will create the desired engagement while respecting privacy and confidentiality requires tailoring them to participants' preferences and needs. Moreover, programs that conduct rigorous evaluations, such as randomized controlled trials, must balance participants' preferences and needs with the requirements of their methodological approach.



Insights from the Field

"One of the primary ways we address concerns [around intimate partner and domestic violence] from the very beginning is that communication is direct with participants . . . We ask them: What is the best private way to communicate with you? Telling them from the very beginning, you do not have to tell anybody else—your partner, your parent, your neighbor—that you are receiving these funds. That's a practice that we included earlier on, specifying that your participation is voluntary and anonymous. We will never share that you are participating in this program with anyone else."

-Chief Program Officer at a nonprofit organization managing GI pilots in California

An effective communication strategy requires establishing clear objectives and aligning program communications with participant preferences. Meeting the needs and preferences of participants may require using a variety of communication channels to maintain their privacy (such as secure online platforms, digital communications like email and text messages, and in-person meetings) or limiting communications to the bare minimum required for participation. Considering participant preferences to inform communication strategies and designing them with the risks and challenges of specific populations in mind ensures that the program does not inadvertently infringe on participants' confidentiality or expose them to stigma or harm.



Insights from the Field

"[Confirming payments have been received] also provides these monthly touch points for folks, so that if somebody is experiencing violence, exploitation, isolation . . . we do have these points of contact to keep in touch with folks and to provide opportunities to learn if there are additional supports needed."

-Chief Operating Officer at a GI pilot focusing on survivors of human trafficking

Challenge 9. Aligning Communications Strategies

Aligning communications strategies with participants' preferences and needs.

Strategies

- Collect data on participants' communication preferences and align program communications by developing a strategy that anticipates their diverse needs, especially when working with marginalized populations.
- Establish clear communication objectives from the beginning and follow what is planned and agreed upon with participants.
- Ensure that program communications protect participants' confidentiality to limit unwanted exposure that may lead to exploitation and stigma.

Balance Confidentiality with Community Building

GI stakeholders highlight the benefits of creating spaces and opportunities for participants to build a sense of community and solidarity while stressing the need to safeguard participants' privacy and confidentiality. Participant engagement strategies should be designed to foster connections. By adopting strategies that prioritize participants' confidentiality, programs can still create meaningful opportunities for engagement, peer support, and collective action. Establishing clear protocols and boundaries around disclosing personal information—both within and outside of program activities—ensures that participants' privacy is respected while allowing them to share experiences and build connections safely.

Programs can use anonymous or opt-in models for group discussions and support networks, where participants can engage without feeling compelled to disclose sensitive or identifying information. Providing staff with regular training on managing privacy boundaries and promoting respectful communication strengthens both participants' safety and community cohesion. Such training should also equip facilitators to guide meetings and interactions in ways that minimize the risk of participants unintentionally revealing personal or sensitive information. Striking a thoughtful balance between active participant engagement and privacy not only safeguards participants' rights but can strengthen the overall sense of trust and belonging within the program.

Challenge 10. Balancing Confidentiality and Privacy with Program Components

Developing program components that promote community building and exchange among program participants while balancing their confidentiality and privacy.

Strategies

- Creating opportunities for community engagement, peer support, and collective action while prioritizing communication strategies guaranteeing participant protection.
- Establishing clear protocols and boundaries around disclosing personal information and ensuring participants are aware and respectful of them.
- Providing regular training for staff on avoiding the disclosure of sensitive and identifying information, including during community-building activities.

Establish Safeguarding Protocols and Resources

Safeguarding in social programming refers to preventing, mitigating, and responding to harm and abuse experienced by individuals as a result of participation in the program (Norwegian People's Aid 2019). Though safeguarding is a common practice among social programs that serve children, it can and should be integrated into programs that work with any population at an increased risk of exploitation and abuse (GiveDirectly 2024; Women Win 2022). While research shows that directing benefits to women can have positive effects on their agency and autonomy by reducing exposure to domestic violence (Buller et al. 2018), the parallel risk of exposing women to increased violence as a result of shifts in their control over resources and agency should not be overlooked (Bobonis et al. 2013; El-Zoghbi and Mehta 2023).

Developing safeguarding protocols is particularly important when programs target groups and communities that are vulnerable to violence and exploitation, such as youth, survivors of domestic violence, and people experiencing homelessness. While many programs cannot provide caseworker services, training staff to identify potential risks and develop protocols to address them is integral to establishing adequate safeguarding. This includes protocols that inform participants on how to report exploitation and abuse and creating policies for addressing such reports. This may include creating forms or portals where participants can request staff support, selecting program features—such as communication strategies and payment methods—that respond to participants' evolving needs, and identifying and establishing connections with external resources for people experiencing violence and exploitation.

Challenge 11. Developing Safeguarding Protocols

Developing safeguarding protocols to anticipate and respond to participant reports of exploitation and abuse.

Strategies

- Identify the level of risks of exploitation, abuse, and violence within the target community.
- Develop safeguarding protocols to collect data and respond to participant reports of exploitation and abuse.
- Train staff to help anticipate, mitigate, and respond to instances of exploitation and abuse.



5

Engage Communities Through Participatory Approaches





Stakeholders' reflections on prior evaluations and deliberative processes reveal a consistent conclusion: Participatory approaches meaningfully enhance how GI programs are designed, implemented, and evaluated. Involving community members at different stages of the program helps address their needs and respond to feedback throughout the program's duration. Creating opportunities for community members and peers with similar lived experiences also values local knowledge and builds capacity, especially for caregivers and women. This way, underrepresented groups, particularly women, can inform their needs, constraints, and priorities, which are shaped by daily realities such as unpaid care work, mobility restrictions, safety concerns, and access to resources, and help shape design features, implementation mechanisms, and evaluation best practices. Participatory processes ensure that policies and programs are informed by these lived experiences, resulting in more relevant and responsive design. Not only do participatory approaches create spaces for women to actively contribute to decision-making rather than being passive recipients of benefits, but they also enhance the development and dissemination of program evaluations by highlighting impacts that participants find meaningful.

Democratize Decision-Making in Program Design

Involving community members and CBOs in program design ensures GI programs address specific needs effectively (see Figure 4). Participatory approaches help identify the groups experiencing the greatest need, the best ways to engage them in the program, and how to guarantee good relationship building. Most importantly, beyond supporting the integration of a gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approach, community members and CBOs can play a critical role in shaping program design. Their input can help identify the most appropriate features, including optimal benefit levels, program duration to ensure sustainable impact, necessary accompanying services, effective onboarding and offboarding strategies, and tailored communications approaches. Community insights can be gathered through interviews, focus groups, surveys, forums, and open calls, which are good ways to incorporate marginalized voices to redistribute power in program design.

Additionally, using participatory approaches throughout the program cycle helps surface issues participants encounter, such as payment-platform challenges, difficulties with data collection, and shifts in communication preferences. Establishing continuous feedback loops can enable adjustments to improve ongoing program performance. GI programs with mechanisms that empower participants to share their experiences and perspectives, such as advisory boards or regular check-ins, reported an enhanced ability to identify the need for policy adjustments (see Box 3). These feedback loops should be accessible, transparent, and responsive, allowing participants to share opinions without fear or judgment.

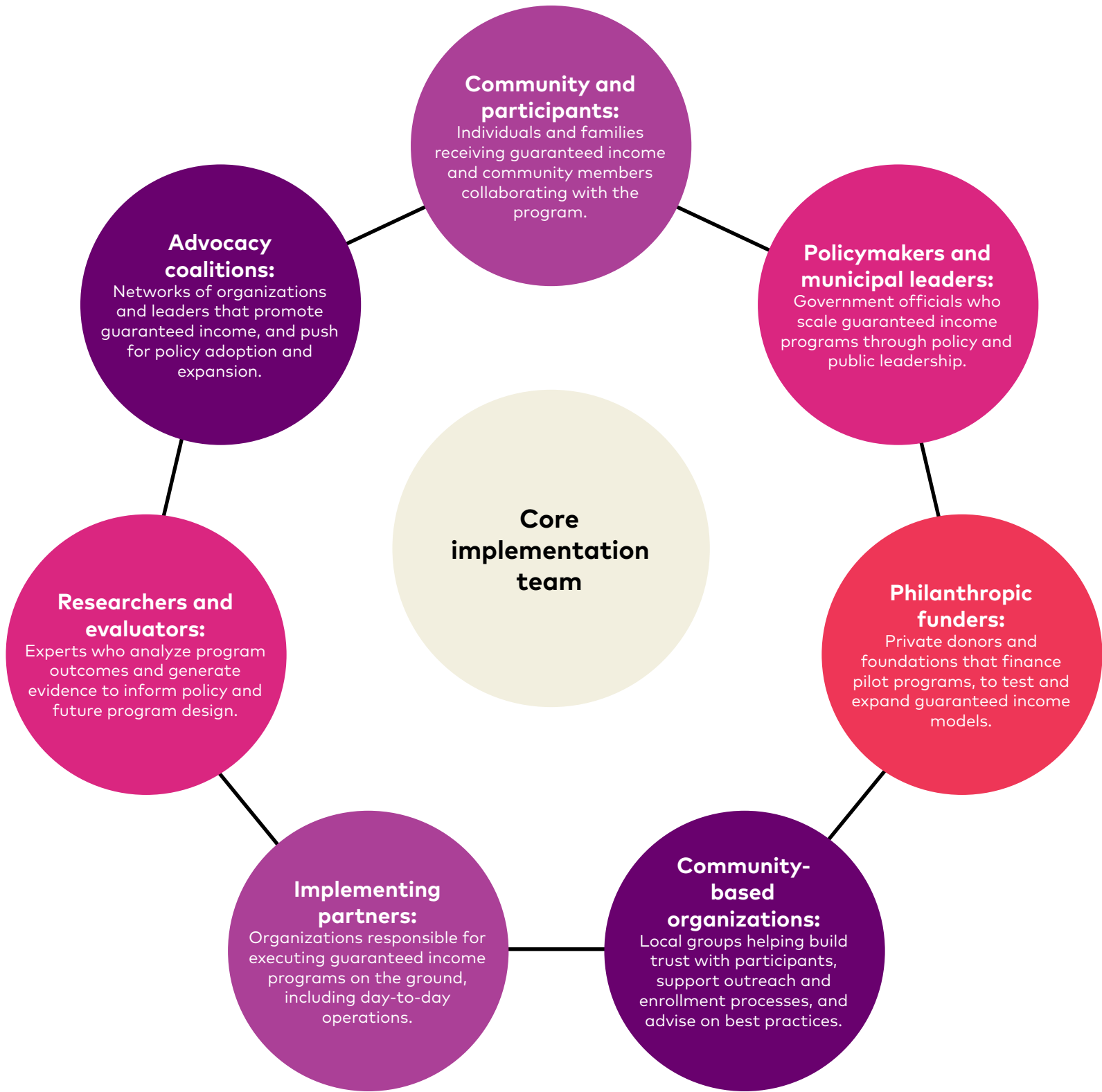


Insights from the Field

"We shouldn't think that [selecting a benefit level] is just up to researchers, academics, and intellectuals to make that number. I also think we should make sure that there's always that community component because then people feel understood . . . as to why the sort of decisions were made, that they were part of it."

-Program Manager at an advocacy organization promoting GI pilots nationally

Figure 4. Galaxy of Stakeholders and Partners





Insights from the Field

"It was really cool that we got to hear from folks about what may work best, and then really bring all of that feedback into the design discussion. It felt really good to know that you're giving people what they asked for."

-Program Associate at an international nonprofit organization promoting GI programs

Challenge 12. Creating Opportunities for Participation for Program Stakeholders

Creating opportunities for program stakeholders, including community members, to participate in program design.

Strategies

- Integrate participatory approaches into planning and program design stages by implementing focus groups or forums in partnership with CBOs.
- Conduct participatory research to gather information on community needs and program feature preferences, such as benefit levels, duration, payment systems, communication strategies, and evaluation approaches.
- Employ participatory approaches such as focus groups or interviews throughout program implementation to identify emerging issues.



Insights from the Field

"For the participatory research, at every step we ask our lived experience experts on the Community Advisory Board, 'Where is the best place to do it? What should we eat? How should we organize ourselves?'"

-Researcher evaluating a GI pilot in Pennsylvania

"One of the best parts of partnering with [program participants] is that they get to shape so many aspects of the work without bearing the burden of implementation. They're busy, dedicated working moms committed to creating change for their families and communities. Our role is to listen, recognize their leadership as family experts, and bring their ideas to life."

-Director of Family-Centered Philanthropy at a GI program serving mothers in Michigan

Engage in Community Capacity Building

Encouraging community participation in program implementation fosters both capacity building and stronger community connections. Several GI programs have found that peer-led support services and community engagement opportunities significantly enhance participant involvement and improve outcomes (Lippman et al. 2023; Nishimura et al. 2024). These approaches can be particularly important for advancing gender equity, as they help address gender-specific barriers to access, trust, and sustained participation, while amplifying

the voices and leadership of women and gender-diverse participants. Program staff with shared lived experiences and peer mentors can provide information to assist participants in navigating the GI program, engaging in goal-setting in preparation for program conclusion, and connecting participants to other resources. These services can be invaluable when participants are going through a transition, such as recent survivors of domestic violence and recently unhoused families.

Peer-led support services contribute to capacity building within participant communities by expanding access to information, enhancing the skills of peer service providers, and strengthening social networks that can connect people to resources in times of need.



Insights from the Field

"One of the first things that we do is hire youth consultants from the local area so that they are part of all the processes throughout. . . . A lot of times, we will do focus groups depending [on] if there are still decisions that need to be made . . . so that they, other young people, have their voices heard as far as what's needed for program design and things like that."

-Vice President at a GI pilot program addressing youth homelessness

Challenge 13. Creating Opportunities for Community Capacity Building

Creating opportunities for community capacity building throughout design and implementation.

Strategies

- Develop opportunities to engage community members in program implementation through establishing advisory councils and peer mentorship.
- Provide training opportunities for community members engaged in unpaid or paid program roles to develop community capacity.

Foster Dialogue to Challenge Harmful Discourse and Create Narrative Change

Participatory processes also create spaces where stereotypes and social norms can be challenged and reimagined. Such processes can provide policymakers with alternative and complementary insights into the needs and challenges of the population they aim to serve. Participation opportunities are vital for challenging stereotypes and stigmas faced by women—especially women of color—on social assistance in the United States. While policymakers often aim for evidence-based decisions, research from one context may not reliably apply to another. Inviting the community to share their perspectives on their needs and the barriers they face in their specific contexts can improve the design and responsiveness of GI programs. This is particularly relevant given that many programs are implemented by collectives of local and national actors at relatively small scales.

Challenge 14. Fostering Dialogue

Fostering dialogue to challenge harmful discourse and promote narrative change.

Strategies

- Create spaces for program staff and community members to discuss harmful discourses and stereotypes to ensure program design does not reinforce them.
- Develop a program narrative that challenges negative rhetoric and stereotypes about targeted communities' access to direct assistance.
- Craft a program narrative that promotes gender equity and racial justice.

Insights from the Field

"Working with the planning group helped us understand that we had to unpack biases. Even though we're in the social sciences environment here, we still come to the table with our own experiences and our own judgments. So, working with the group and especially the community members really did help us have some "ah ha" moments and to understand the ALICE [asset limited, income constrained, employed] population."

-Director of Community Services working with a GI pilot in Virginia

"Someone raised a concern about an early draft of the program description, asking, 'Does this framing unintentionally reinforce the stereotype that Black and Latino fathers aren't involved with their families?' I really appreciated that question because it gave me a chance to clarify that the data shows Black and Latino fathers are highly active and engaged with their children. This initiative focuses on mothers because in our area, that's where the data shows there is a significant need based on our research question. At the same time, we're mindful not to unintentionally perpetuate harmful and false narratives about fathers, who are also critical to family well-being."

-Director of Family-Centered Philanthropy at a GI program serving mothers in Michigan

Box 3. The Trust Youth Initiative Participatory Design Process

The Trust Youth Initiative launched by Point Source Youth (PSY) provides two years of \$1,150 monthly and voluntary support services to 29 youth experiencing homelessness in New York City. The program has integrated participatory approaches at all stages of design and implementation to “ensure that the program’s design and delivery reflect the needs and preferences of youth with lived experience of homelessness, especially Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and LGBTQ youth” (Chapin Hall 2021).

The Trust Youth Initiative was informed by empirical evidence on cash transfers and interventions to address youth homelessness, as well as extensive stakeholder engagement. The stakeholder engagement included conducting interviews with “youth with lived expertise of homelessness,” including those with experience accessing emergency services, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and who are pregnant and parenting and active in homelessness advocacy (Morton et al. 2020).

PSY Vice President Anjala Huff highlighted the role those participatory methods played in creating the program, recounting,

“Point Source Youth started direct cash transfers in 2017. The idea came because of our host home and rapid rehousing work. We found that youth who received a list of interested landlords were able to run with the list and started applying immediately. This highlighted the importance of empowering young people’s agency and creativity. With that in mind, our founder had a lightbulb moment during the Economic Security Project’s CASH Conference. Cash was the missing piece to the puzzle. That next year, PSY started fundraising to do focus groups in NYC on how to best implement and launch the pilot, which became a major part of the Trust Youth Initiative.”

By engaging in participatory methods, program stakeholders were able to identify the limitations of current policy responses to youth homelessness, which were found to limit participants’ agency and autonomy, and lacked the flexibility needed to address their diverse needs.

The Trust Youth Initiative’s selection of program features, such as duration and benefit level, was also informed by the insights garnered by engaging youth in participatory approaches (Morton et al. 2020). The program is designed to respect participant agency and give them choices whenever possible. This is reflected not only in the provision of unrestricted cash but also in participants’ ability to choose how they would like to receive their benefits and when they would like to receive the program’s enrichment fund, which provides a lump sum payment to support their transition to permanent housing.





Develop Offboarding Strategies





GI programs typically offer participants cash benefits for a fixed duration of 12 to 24 months. Studies have shown that this financial certainty significantly reduces stress and income volatility among recipients. Program evaluations have also demonstrated that the cessation of benefits negatively affects participants' well-being and that improvements in economic and social indicators diminish after programs end (Francois et al. 2024; Brugger et al. 2024). Stakeholders in the GI space must make tough decisions when balancing the scope, duration, and sustainability of their initiatives (see Figure 4). While funding constraints continue to require careful prioritization, establishing clear offboarding protocols can empower both program administrators and participants to transition smoothly at the end of the benefit period, helping sustain the program's positive impacts beyond its formal duration.

Leverage Communication for Offboarding

A recurring concern identified in cash assistance research and echoed by GI stakeholders is how to design effective strategies that prevent participants from experiencing financial or emotional shocks when program payments conclude. Although programs typically communicate the benefit duration at enrollment, sending periodic reminders can help participants better prepare for the end of payments. Pairing these reminders with opportunities for discussion and planning can ensure the messaging is supportive rather than alarming. Several GI programs incorporate goal-setting and financial planning education into participant engagement activities. Strategically aligning communications about the benefits timeline with opportunities for reflection and financial planning can better equip participants to manage the program's conclusion, helping to safeguard their well-being and reduce the risk of post-program setbacks.

Challenge 15. Anticipating Offboarding Challenges

Anticipating and addressing participant challenges after program conclusion.

Strategies

- Create a strategy to clearly communicate program duration at the start and gather feedback from participants on how they would like to be reminded of this date.
- Incorporate periodic reminders of the program end date in the communications strategy to help participants anticipate the cessation of payments.
- Support participants in preparing their financial planning leading up to the program's end.



Insights from the Field

"We set up a notification schedule, basically where we kind of counted down with folks from the six months, three months, one month mark. Just like a gentle reminder, 'Hey, your next payment is this day. You have six months left in the program.' . . . We asked folks what kinds of resources would be helpful for them to have as the program came to a close and were able to use that data to inform virtual offboarding sessions."

-Program Associate at an international nonprofit organization promoting GI programs

Introducing Ongoing Benefits Counseling

Helping GI participants navigate the benefits cliff and ensuring they do not jeopardize their participation in other benefits programs, especially in cases where a benefits reduction could become permanent, is an important objective for stakeholders in the GI space. Benefits counseling at enrollment has become a common practice by GI programs to ensure participants make informed decisions about their participation. Ongoing benefits counseling may also be helpful, especially as participants prepare for the end of their GI benefits. Since participants' financial situations often change throughout the program, helping them identify resources to maintain their economic security can contribute to the sustainability of the gains they make.

Challenge 16. Assisting Participants Navigating Benefits Cliff

Assisting participants in navigating the benefits cliff and cessation of benefits at program end.

Strategies

- Providing benefits counseling at enrollment to help participants understand the benefits cliff and ensure they make informed decisions about their participation.
- Support participants during offboarding by providing benefits counseling to help them identify additional sources of support.
- If possible, provide access to financial counseling after the program has ended.



Insights from the Field

"The other piece of feedback that we've heard from folks is, can the [benefits counselor] be available after disbursements end? And so that's a piece that we had not built into the original program. But we have been thinking about 'How do we maintain community?' So that request came up very organically and I think it's something that we will advocate for, to keep them [benefits counselors] around for probably six months after disbursements end."

-Chief Operating Officer at a GI pilot focusing on survivors of human trafficking

Provide Links to Resources and Maintain Connection

In addition to strategic communications and benefits counseling, many stakeholders discussed the positive impacts of providing **cash-plus services** in the lead-up to offboarding and after payments end. Some GI programs have in-house capacity to offer cash-plus services, while others partner with organizations to provide mental health support and parenting and financial-planning workshops, among other programming (Bogle et al. 2022). GI program evaluations have underscored the positive impacts of creating community-building opportunities for participants, particularly among groups sharing a common experience such as pregnancy, parenthood, homelessness, or justice system involvement. Several stakeholders reported that their programs provide end-of-program events to recognize and celebrate participants' journeys. Developing community-building opportunities and communication channels for participants after the cessation of payments can contribute to the sustainability of participants' positive outcomes.

Cash-plus services are programs that pair regular cash assistance with complementary and targeted services to address structural barriers, build resilience, promote lasting empowerment, and enhance impact beyond income support.

Challenge 17. Sustaining Positive Impacts

Supporting participants as they navigate the program's conclusion to sustain its positive impacts.

Strategies

- Facilitate access to voluntary cash-plus services, such as mental health support, parenting, and financial planning workshops, to enhance participants' experience and improve the sustainability of program outcomes.
- Develop community-building opportunities and communication channels to facilitate participants' access to a support network after program completion.
- Build on existing community engagement by formalizing partnerships with CBOs and local coalitions to actively identify service gaps and coordinate or provide access to complementary supports, such as health care and well-being services, community-based child and elder care, education, and job-training resources, to improve eligibility awareness, streamline referrals, and strengthen participant outcomes.



7

Conduct Gender-Sensitive Research and Evaluations





Adopting a gender-sensitive approach to data collection and analysis is essential for understanding how programs are experienced and how their impacts differ across genders. Research on cash transfers has underscored the negative consequences of overlooking the program's gendered impacts (Molyneux and Thomson 2011). Feminist scholarship has emphasized the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into research design, data collection, and analysis when evaluating social programs. This includes examining how programs affect the distribution of unpaid care versus paid care work, economic empowerment, intra-household decision-making, and safety, among other areas (Lokot and Bhatia 2020; Saeidzadeh 2023). By incorporating these gendered dimensions into data collection and analysis, stakeholders can gain deeper insights into how GI programs contribute to closing gender gaps and fostering greater equity, ensuring that policies are responsive to the diverse needs of all participants.

Collect and Publish Gender-Disaggregated Data

Collecting gender-disaggregated data, alongside other demographic markers such as race, ethnicity, and age, is essential for advancing research on the differential gender and intersectional impacts of social policies and programs. It is now standard practice for surveys to collect gender-disaggregated data, with many offering options beyond a binary choice. Interestingly, many GI program evaluations do not share gender-disaggregated results related to their findings. Several stakeholders highlighted the methodological challenges of providing gender-disaggregated findings in quantitative studies due to sampling limitations, where the samples are too small to have statistical power when disaggregated by demographic variables. Subsequently, the presentation and discussion of gender-related findings are often found only in mixed-methods and qualitative research. Moreover, in some programs, participants are overwhelmingly of one gender, and the identification of differences between participants of different genders is overlooked. Though there are practical reasons for collecting but not sharing gender-disaggregated data, sharing such data at the descriptive level can benefit stakeholders in the GI space by raising questions for future research.

Challenge 18. Measuring and Disseminating Gender Disaggregated Findings

Measuring and disseminating gender-disaggregated research findings on program impact on participants.

Strategies

- Ensure that all data collection tools collect gender-disaggregated data.
- Include gender-disaggregated data in program publications such as evaluation reports, even if only at the descriptive level.

Collecting Gender-Sensitive Data

Collecting gender-sensitive data—such as time devoted to child care, time spent commuting, independent management of finances, concerns about safety, and other examples detailed in [Table 2](#)—ensures that research and evaluations can identify GI programs' impact on participants and contributions toward achieving gender equity. By gathering data that reflects the gendered dimensions of participants' economic, social, and relational realities,

stakeholders can gain a deeper understanding of how GI programs affect gender disparities in areas such as the distribution of unpaid care work, time poverty, and empowerment and agency (Buvinic and King 2018). Additionally, gender-sensitive data can shed light on the impact that GI programs have on intra-household dynamics, exposure to domestic and gender-based violence, access to social networks, and community building. Adopting gender-sensitive data collection ensures that research and evaluations can capture the programs' impact on the economic and social dimensions that must be addressed to foster gender equity.

Challenge 19. Collecting Sensitive Data

Collecting gender-sensitive data to measure programs' gendered impacts and disseminate gender-disaggregated findings.

Strategies

- Integrate gender-sensitive data collection into program evaluation to measure changes in social and economic outcomes by gender.
- Prioritize collecting data that facilitates the analysis of changes in intra-household relations, including decision-making power, exposure to violence, and family dynamics.

Balance Research Aims with Participant Needs

Generating evidence to demonstrate the multitude of diverse benefits that GI programs have on participants and their communities has been pivotal to the expansion of the landscape of programs and growing public support for GI initiatives. Certain types of research, such as randomized controlled trials (RCTs), can only be conducted under certain conditions, which can have implications for the program's design. For example, creating optimal conditions to conduct an RCT often requires that GI programs avoid creating spaces for community building that require allowing participants to meet each other. In interviews with GI stakeholders, they spoke about the observed benefits that participants gained from having spaces where they could build community through discussions, education, and celebrations. Ensuring that programs can have the most significant positive impact on participants requires careful consideration of what program features best align with their policy and research objectives.



Insights from the Field

"They're not program participants. They're partners in this study, collaborating with us to co-create solutions and policy campaigns for systemic change. Their insights are essential; we couldn't do this without them. When it came to selecting data metrics, we started by saying, 'Here's the data we're interested in and why,' but we couldn't finalize the data plan until we met the women participating and learned what data and insight from the study is important to them. It's not just our data—it's theirs too."

-Director of Family-Centered Philanthropy at a GI program serving mothers in Michigan



Insights from the Field

"We don't do any tracking of transaction-level data and that was part of the trauma-informed component of [the design]. Especially with this population [survivors of human trafficking] because financial abuse is so severe [when it comes to] trafficking, really being mindful [to] not mirror those things and pick over pennies or even give somebody the feeling that somebody's watching how [they] spend money."

-Chief Operating Officer at a GI pilot focusing on survivors of human trafficking

Challenge 20. Balancing Research Objectives and Participant Needs

Striking a balance between achieving research objectives and meeting participant needs.

Strategies

- Build strategies to identify conflicts between evaluation research aims, methods, and participant needs.
- Develop strategies to mitigate and harmonize research aims and methods with participants' needs.

Table 2. Examples of Gender-Sensitive Data Collection

Topic	Areas of inquiry
Unpaid care work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time dedicated to child care • Time dedicated to elder care • Time dedicated to caring for persons with disabilities • Financial resources dedicated to caring supplies • Time dedicated to care while multitasking • Sources of unpaid care support within and outside of the household (child care, essential goods delivery, meal preparation, cleaning services)
Time poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time dedicated to paid work • Time dedicated to unpaid work • Time dedicated to leisure • Time dedicated to rest • Time dedicated to self-care activities • Time spent with children • Time spent with family and friends • Time dedicated to commuting
Empowerment and agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent management of income and savings • Allocation of income to personal needs • Perceived self-worth and confidence
Family dynamics and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-household decision-making (spending and budgeting) • Relationship satisfaction with children, partners, and extended family • Parenting practices (decision-making, parenting duties) • Levels of intra-household conflict and tension
Violence and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences of domestic violence • Experiences of gender-based violence • Experiences of trafficking and exploitation • Exit of domestic violence, trafficking, or exploitative situations • Experience of crime in personal or community settings • Concerns about safety in public spaces

Final Take Away: Leveraging GI for Gender Equity

The rapid expansion of GI programs across the United States creates a powerful and unprecedented opportunity to leverage direct cash assistance as a catalyst for advancing gender equity. The success of GI programs has demonstrated the power of investing in individuals and communities through direct cash assistance and challenged the supposed supremacy of punitive, restrictive, and conditional social assistance.

Built on rigorous research and the lived experiences of stakeholders across the GI field, this toolkit articulates a bold vision for how GI programs can serve as engines of gender justice. It calls on practitioners to embed gender-sensitive and gender-responsive strategies that not only strengthen program outcomes but also actively challenge the structural inequities women face every day. Through intentional design and implementation, GI programs can help transform systems and expand women's economic and social power.

Gender mainstreaming in GI programs can enhance their design, implementation, and evaluation by enabling stakeholders to field programs that actively promote gender equity (see Figure 5). This includes ensuring that women, in all their diversity, can participate in GI programs by anticipating and addressing gender-specific barriers to enrollment and by designing inclusive and equitable targeting guidelines.

Inspired by the principles of the GI movement and its community engagement, and drawing on both research and practitioner experience, this toolkit provides clear, actionable guidance on how GI programs can deepen their impact on women and meaningfully advance gender equity by:

- Underscoring the critical importance of gender mainstreaming to ensure GI programs expand the positive impacts for participants and their communities—especially women—and avoid inadvertently reinforcing restrictive gender norms that limit women's empowerment.
- Highlighting how gender-sensitive and gender-responsive design and implementation practices create GI programs that are more inclusive, more equitable, and more effective.
- Discussing approaches to participatory program decision-making that help programs respond to and reflect the priorities and perspectives of participants and their communities. Engaging in this approach entails committing to program features and policies that promote accessibility, transparency, and confidentiality to ensure that adverse effects of participation are minimized.
- Suggesting offboarding processes that promote the sustainability of programs' positive impacts on participant outcomes, including improvements in economic security and mental health.
- Recommending expanding the scope of evaluations to ensure that programs are more adequately capturing their impact on areas that will help stakeholders identify programs' contributions to gender equity and their limitations. Conducting gender-sensitive GI program evaluations will provide crucial insights into how programs can more effectively implement gender mainstreaming, creating a feedback loop that will enhance the program's gender responsiveness.

Figure 5. Life cycle for Introducing Gender Mainstreaming into GI Programs

		Implementation				
		Recruitment, selection, and communications	Disbursement	Offboarding	Evaluation	
Main Activities	<p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Define goals and target population. •Secure funding and partnerships. •Assess feasibility. •Engage stakeholders. •Establish governance structure. 	<p>Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Set eligibility criteria and payment structure. •Develop outreach strategy. •Design data collection and evaluation framework. •Ensure equity and inclusion considerations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Conduct outreach and communications. •Screen applicants. •Select participants (e.g., lottery or criteria-based). •Confirm enrollment and consent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Set up payment systems. •Disburse funds regularly. •Provide participant support. •Monitor delivery and resolve issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Prepare participants for program end. •Provide transition resources. •Clearly communicate timelines. •Conduct exit surveys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Collect and analyze data. •Assess outcomes and impacts. •Document lessons learned. •Share findings with stakeholders and policymakers.
Gender-mainstreaming activities	<p>Challenge 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Partner with CBOs and communities to understand gender norms and dynamics. •Identify gender disparities in income, employment, and unpaid care, and assess how these shape the needs and challenges of marginalized or economically insecure groups. <p>Challenge 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assess how participation might affect household dynamics, including work distribution, resource control, and decision-making. •Identify legal, cultural, or institutional barriers to women's participation and develop strategies to mitigate risks through clear communication and access to support. <p>Challenge 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use inclusive language in all communications, including eligibility and outreach. •Design eligibility criteria to support diverse caregivers, including nontraditional ones. <p>Challenge 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use participatory methods (e.g., focus groups, forums) in planning and design with CBOs. •Conduct participatory research to understand community needs and program preferences. 	<p>Challenge 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use gender-inclusive language in all communications. •Avoid gender-specific terms when referring to parents, pregnant people, and caregivers in inclusive programs. <p>Challenge 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use light-touch eligibility checks with flexible proof-of-income documents. •Assess need and eligibility using broader indicators (e.g., employment, food security, housing stability). •Use alternatives to means testing, such as geographic targeting, CBO referrals, or participatory selection. <p>Challenge 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use a two-stage application—a minimal initial screening followed by detailed verification. •Offer accessible applications in multiple formats for online and in-person submission. •Provide materials in relevant community languages. •Pilot the application with community partners to ensure clarity and reach groups with limited access to social assistance. <p>Challenge 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Offer multiple payment options (e.g., direct deposit, debit cards, checks, electronic transfers). •Let participants choose their preferred method and adapt as needs change. •Ensure systems are accessible, safe, and inclusive of those outside mainstream banking. 	<p>Challenge 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tailor communications to participants' preferences, especially for marginalized groups. •Set clear communication objectives and follow agreed-upon plans. •Protect participant confidentiality to prevent exposure, stigma, or exploitation. <p>Challenge 11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assess risks of exploitation, abuse, and violence in the target community. •Develop protocols to detect and respond to such risks. •Train staff to identify, prevent, and address exploitation and abuse. <p>Challenge 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Continue participatory engagement during implementation to identify emerging issues. <p>Challenge 14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Create spaces for staff and communities to address harmful stereotypes. •Develop messaging that challenges negative narratives about direct assistance and cash transfers. •Promote gender equity and racial justice in program communications. 	<p>Challenge 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Establish and clearly communicate accountability mechanisms and procedures before implementation. •Ensure systems provide transparent, efficient feedback and grievance resolution. <p>Challenge 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Foster community engagement and peer support while ensuring participant protection. •Set and communicate clear boundaries for sharing personal information. •Train staff regularly to prevent disclosure of sensitive information. <p>Challenge 13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Create opportunities for community involvement through advisory councils and peer mentorship. •Provide training to build capacity for community members in program roles. 	<p>Challenge 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clearly communicate program duration upfront and gather participant preferences for receiving reminders. •Provide regular reminders about the end date. •Support participants' financial planning for the transition. <p>Challenge 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide benefits counseling at enrollment to explain potential impacts (e.g., benefits cliffs). •Offer continued counseling during offboarding to connect participants to other supports. •When possible, extend access to financial counseling after the program ends. <p>Challenge 17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide access to voluntary "cash-plus" supports (e.g., mental health, parenting, financial planning). •Create community-building opportunities and communication channels to sustain support networks. •Partner with CBOs and coalitions to identify service gaps and connect participants to complementary services (e.g., health care, child care, education, job training). 	<p>Challenge 18</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Collect gender-disaggregated data in all data tools. •Include gender-disaggregated data in program reporting, even at a descriptive level. <p>Challenge 19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Incorporate gender-sensitive data collection to track outcomes by gender. •Prioritize data on intra-household dynamics, including decision-making, violence exposure, and family relations. <p>Challenge 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identify potential conflicts between evaluation goals, methods, and participant needs. •Develop strategies to align and balance research objectives with participant well-being.



1. Design

- How do gender norms shape social dynamics, intra-household relations, the division of labor, and access to opportunities, resources, and services in the community? (Challenge 1)
- What strategies exist to anticipate and address adverse effects of program implementation? (Challenge 2)
- Does program targeting reinforce gendered expectations of unpaid care work, including caregiving and social programs participation? (Challenge 3)
- Are there opportunities for program stakeholders, including community members, to participate in program design? (Challenge 12)

2. Implementation

- Has the program prevented the use of language that reinforces stereotypes around program participants, that reinforces gender norms, or that excludes gender diverse people from participating in the program? (Challenge 4)
- Is there a gender-sensitive approach to means testing that considers and captures inequality in the intra-household distribution of income and assets to adequately capture individual participants' access to economic resources? (Challenge 5)
- Is program recruitment and the application process inclusive, clear, and efficient? (Challenge 6)
- Are payment systems flexible and responsive to participants' diverse needs? (Challenge 7)
- Do accountability measures exist that adequately address grievance and complaints to foster trust and strengthen community engagement? (Challenge 8)
- Are communications strategies aligned with participants' preferences and needs? (Challenge 9)

2. Implementation



Is there a balance between participant's confidentiality and privacy with program components that build community? (Challenge 10)



Do safeguarding protocols anticipate and respond to participant reports of exploitation and abuse? (Challenge 11)



Have opportunities for community capacity building been created? (Challenge 13)



Does the program foster dialogue to challenge harmful discourse and promote narrative change? (Challenge 14)



Are participant challenges after program conclusion anticipated and addressed? (Challenge 15)



Are participants assisted as they navigate the benefits cliff and cessation of benefits at program end? (Challenge 16)



Are participants supported as they navigate the conclusion of the program to sustain its positive impacts? (Challenge 17)

3. Evaluation



Are gender-disaggregated research findings on program impact on participants measured and disseminated? (Challenge 18)



Is gender-sensitive data collected to measure programs' gendered impacts and disseminate gender-disaggregated findings? (Challenge 19)



Is there a balance between achieving research objectives and meeting participants' needs? (Challenge 20)



Gender Mainstreaming in GI Programs: Self-Assessment

For each feature of gender mainstreaming listed below, ask yourself: **To what extent is this in place in my work?** Score your work in design, implementation, and/or research from 0 - 3. Then use the next page to interpret your results and reflect on next steps.

Score	Meaning
0	Not in Place
1	Partially in place
2	Mostly in place
3	Fully in place



Gender Mainstreaming in Design

Score

Identification of how gender norms shape social dynamics, intra-household relations, the division of labor, and access to resources.

Strategies to anticipate and address adverse effects of program implementation.

Inclusive program targeting (i.e., does not reinforce gendered expectations of unpaid care work).

Opportunities for program stakeholders, including community members, to participate in program design.

I mostly scored



Gender Mainstreaming in Implementation

Score

Avoidance of language that reinforces stereotypes and gender norms, or that excludes gender diverse people from participation.

Gender-sensitive means testing that considers unequal income distribution within a household to identify individuals' access to economic resources.

Inclusive, clear, and efficient program recruitment and application process.

Payment systems that are flexible and responsive to participants' diverse needs.

Accountability measures that address grievances to foster trust and strengthen community engagement.

Communications strategies aligned with participants' preferences and needs.

Balance between participants' confidentiality and privacy with activities that build community.

Protocols to anticipate and respond to participant reports of exploitation and abuse.

I mostly scored



Gender Mainstreaming in GI Programs: Self-Assessment

Gender Mainstreaming in Implementation Score

Communications strategies aligned with participants' preferences and needs.

Balance between participants' confidentiality and privacy with activities that build community.

Protocols to anticipate and respond to participant reports of exploitation and abuse.

I mostly scored 

Gender Mainstreaming in Evaluation Score

Measurement and dissemination of gender-disaggregated research findings on program impact on participants.

Collection of gender-sensitive data to measure programs' gendered impacts and disseminate gender-disaggregated findings.

Balance between achieving research objectives and meeting participants' needs.

I mostly scored 

Interpreting Results

If your scores are mostly:	Feedback
0s	<p>It's never too early or too late to pursue gender mainstreaming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is one priority area where you can start incorporating gender mainstreaming? • Who are key allies that can support this development?
1s	<p>Cheers to beginning your gender mainstreaming journey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some potential barriers to continued progress? • How can you mitigate them?
2s	<p>Congratulations—gender mainstreaming is becoming part of your project's foundation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you thought about community participation as you continue these efforts? • What training might you need to sustain recent changes?
3s	<p>Cheers to your dedication to integrating gender mainstreaming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you learn by evaluating the various strategies you've adopted? • What might need adjustment or additional investment? • Where can you exchange your learnings with others?

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